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deserted the village paddy fields at our approach. Dupont told the 361
driver to wait behind as we went into the village. As a convert to 361
the Laotian way of life he paid much attention to local etiquette; 576
he said that we must on no account appear with arms. There were 784
no signs of life in the village and Dupont found this disconcerting. We must keep a careful look-out, he said, for a white thread across the path, or a cross decorated with red flowers. Either would mean that the village was taboo to strangers; in the first case because of a violent death or the presence of epidemic disease and in the second because the feast of the tutelary spirit was being celebrated. It was for reasons of these periodical taboos that Laotian villages, although built as near as possible to roads, were not actually *on them*. The places where we had stopped that day were not true Laotian villages at all, but military posts, around which a few store-keepers, mostly Chinese, had grouped themselves.

Although Dupont could find no signs of a definite taboo, he was 576
still very uneasy that no one had come out to greet us. The correct 784
thing on entering a Laotian village with the intention of staying the night was to ask for the headman and obtain his permission to do so. Unless this were done it would be a grave discourtesy to enter any house. Dupont emphasized that while the Laotians were tolerant, civilized and hospitable, there were certain indispensable forms, and as we mooched about the deserted village, he poured out information on the subject; even describing the position for correct sleeping; body stretched out at right angles to wall containing door, feet pointing to the door. When I suggested that we might find an empty hut and sleep in it, he was startled. Although the villagers might overlook minor breaches of custom, he said, this would be a grave one, involving them in an expensive purification ceremony before the hut could be occupied again.

I offered no more suggestions and in the end we found a rather 576
scared looking woman who said, when Dupont spoke to her in Laotian, that the headman was away, and was not expected back. It was quite clear now that we were not welcome, and Dupont said

562 rather, to the wife, that she be good and serviceable and that she sweeten the conjugal life.

A great mandarin who has chosen a life's companion, be she the offspring of a family from the common people or not, has raised her to his rank. She is therefore just as respectable, if not more so, as her husband, since the fair sex is, out of courtesy, more highly regarded than the stronger sex in all civilized countries.

We must therefore render the respect to Laotian women which is their due by the same title which makes it the due of Western women. It is necessary:

1. --that at gatherings the women should not sit on the floor while the men are seated in chairs.

2. --that at banquets the women be placed each one between two men;

3. --that the places of honor be reserved for the weaker sex;

4. --that the women be served before the men;

5. --that the man yield his seat to the woman in auditoriums, in vehicles of public conveyance, etc.

In a word, it is necessary that the man respect the woman and that he no longer look upon her as inferior to himself.

* * *

000 To conclude, in my opinion it would be preferable to modify and even to suppress certain of our customs and of our traditional ceremonies provided this modification does not run contrary to Buddhist rules. There would be occasion to regulate, notably, the funeral ceremony in Laos: for example in a funeral procession to prescribe orderly walking and the observance of silence; to prohibit smoking, the chewing of tobacco, and so forth.

771 Sometimes "tradition" and "superstition" are confused. I repeat, all that partakes of the domain of superstition must be banished. The Laotian is subject to a great number of superstitions, of which the following are some examples: /979/

784 It is forbidden, under certain pretexts:

--to have one's hair cut on Wednesday and to wash one's hair on Thursday because it is on these days, it is said, that Buddha had his hair cut and washed;

--to go on all fours in the deep forest, in order not to attract

tigers! 784

--to eat lying down, for fear of turning into a snake; a story told to encourage children to hold themselve well while eating;

--to eat the liver and the gizzard of the chicken, for fear of becoming mad: a story to make children leave, to the adults, all that is good on a dish;

--to open one's strong-box or one's small box for locking up money, jewels or other valuable objects, during the night; wealthy persons who did not observe this rule would soon become poor;

--and finally, to put an end to this long enumeration, there is the interdict to a married couple to sleep in the same bed on the birthday of one of the marriage partners.

I leave you the trouble, Ladies and Gentlemen, to think about these beliefs.

Among us a wedding present consisting of jewels or of silver plate may be of an uneven number. But where bank notes or objects of lesser importance are concerned, the number must always be even. 784 /801/

Certain superstitions come close to French superstitions. For instance: a buzzing in the ears signifies: "Somebody is saying something bad about me somewhere." In Laos if someone drops his bowl of rice while eating, this has the same significance. The buzzing in the ears means that the phi (demon) asks you for the way but that you do not deign to answer. That is why you get a hard box on the ear. Then you must answer him: "Thang louang nok ban!" (Follow the great road which passes in front of the house). An itch in the ears means that it is going to rain. 787

Another French superstition which has passed into a proverb is: "Lucky at cards (play), unlucky in love." Laotians are more fortunate, for they do not have this belief. Among us one can be lucky at play and at the same time lucky in love. 777

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